

VZCZCXRO5555
OO RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHPOD #0261/01 2881903
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O P 141903Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0986
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA 1074

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PODGORICA 000261

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MW](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PROTEST AGAINST KOSOVO RECOGNITION SPARKS CLASHES
IN PODGORICA

REF: PODGORICA 58

PODGORICA 00000261 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 9, in possibly its biggest foreign policy decision since independence, the GoM announced Montenegro's recognition of Kosovo. Opposition parties united to oppose the decision in a letter to the GoM presented late on October 10. On October 13, about 10,000 people assembled in Podgorica for a large protest rally organized by four pro-Serb parties. Protestors demanded that the GoM cancel its decision on Kosovo's recognition by October 15 at 11:00 a.m. and invited the parliament to call a referendum on the same issue. The rally turned violent, with 30 people suffering minor injuries after police and protestors clashed. Police have banned another rally previously scheduled for October 16. END SUMMARY.

Djukanovic: Nobody pressured Montenegro

12. (SBU) Responding to numerous allegations that the GoM recognized Kosovo because of international pressure, especially by the U.S., PM Milo Djukanovic reiterated that the GoM decision was motivated solely by its own national interests, particularly its growing partnership with the European Union and NATO. He did acknowledge that Montenegro's partners have certain expectations. In a similar vein, President Filip Vujanovic stated that Montenegro recognized Kosovo to avoid jeopardizing its strategic objective of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Opposition: GoM Decision "Shameful" and "Treason"

13. (SBU) The Serbian List (SL), Socialist People's Party (SNP), People's Party (NS), and Democratic Serbian Party (DSS) cried foul and immediately organized a protest rally in Podgorica for October 13. Serb leaders Andrija Mandic, Srdjan Milic, and Predrag Popovic described the GoM's decision as shameful and dishonorable. Milic told followers that the rally would protest the "shameful decision" to recognize the "fake state Kosovo

against the will of a large majority of Montenegrin citizens." Popovic claimed that more than 80 percent of citizens oppose the decision. Milic, standing by his word to us on October 10 (septel) that the SNP insist on keeping the rally peaceful, called for a protest by "peaceful and democratic expression of responsible people who will prove they are honorable." The Main Board of the small Democratic Serbian Party (DSS) condemned the GoM for their "act of high treason" calling Kosovo a "terrorist creation on the territory of the south Serbian province."

Podgorica Rally Ends with Violence

¶4. (U) In the run up to the October 13 rally in Podgorica, small demonstrations took place throughout the weekend, primarily in Podgorica, Niksic, Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, and Bar. Increased police presence was visible throughout the weekend, with an impressive show of force in Podgorica on October 13, focused on the protection of government and diplomatic facilities.

¶5. (SBU) According to local press and unofficial police estimates, roughly 10,000 people gathered in Podgorica for the opposition rally. SNP's Vasilije Lalosevic opened the protest by reading a list of demands to be sent to the government, notably that the government annul its recognition of Kosovo by Wednesday, October 15, at 11am and that parliament simultaneously announce a nationwide referendum on the issue. If the GoM fails to comply, Lalosevic asserted, the President would be obliged to announce extraordinary elections by the end

PODGORICA 00000261 002.2 OF 002

of 2008. SL's Andrija Mandic called on the protestors to be brave and persistent in contesting the decision of the government. Opposition Movement for Change (PzP) leader Nebojsa Medojevic attended the rally, along with other party officials, but none addressed the crowd.

¶6. (SBU) The Serbian Orthodox played a central role in the demonstration. Metropolitan Amfilohije was both an organizer and a prominent speaker at the rally. He claimed that the GoM's decision did not respect the will of the majority of the Montenegrin people, and called the decision "treason." Just as he was concluding his almost hour-long speech, demonstrators broke through the police barricade outside the parliament building. Police reacted with tear gas to disperse the crowd and protesters responded by hurling stones, fire crackers and flares at the police. A large contingent of police officers, along with a special police squad, moved in to seal off the parliament building, the nearby Presidency, and the neighboring streets.

¶7. (SBU) Amfilohije and the organizers appealed to the crowd to disperse in peace, but without success. Protesters chanted "Treason, Treason" and "Kosovo is Serbia" as well as slogans against Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, accusing him of "betraying Kosovo." In the melee, some protesters broke through the police cordon in front of the parliament, throwing stones through windows.

¶8. (SBU) Most of those hospitalized suffered minor injuries caused by stones or police batons. Police reportedly detained 28 demonstrators. As the crowd dispersed, several groups of

hooligans continued running through the streets, breaking windows and setting fire to garbage cans, but the damage was minimal. The Ministry of Interior later announced that additional demonstrations would be banned in view of the violent behavior at the October 13 rally. Opposition plans for another rally on October 16 have been cancelled.

¶9. (SBU) The ruling DPS condemned the violence and destruction of property in the streets of downtown Podgorica. The DPS statement professed disappointment with hooligan attacks on government facilities. SNP's Lalosevic also condemned the violence, stating that the rally organizers had no connection with those who carried it out and that the majority of people who came to the rally were intended to protest peacefully.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Most local analysts do not believe the opposition will succeed in reversing the GoM's decision on Kosovo or initiating a referendum on the question. Many likewise believe that that the protests will be short-lived, with the opposition now chastened by the burst of violence. Nevertheless, it is too soon to say definitively whether the October 13 rally will mark the end of the opposition's effort to build momentum against recognition and the ruling coalition generally. We note that, in spite of earlier indications to the contrary, Serbian Ambassador to Montenegro Zoran Lutovac has remained at his post in Podgorica. End Comment.
MOORE